



Article  
scientifique

Compte rendu de  
livre

1999

Published  
version

Open  
Access

This is the published version of the publication, made available in accordance with the publisher's policy.

---

[Review of :] King Edward III / ed. Giorgio Melchiori. - Cambridge, 1998 ;  
Shakespeare's 'Edward III' : An Early Play Restored to the Canon / Eric  
Sams (ed.). - New Haven and London, 1996

---

Erne, Lukas Christian

#### How to cite

ERNE, Lukas Christian. [Review of :] King Edward III / ed. Giorgio Melchiori. - Cambridge, 1998 ;  
Shakespeare's "Edward III" : An Early Play Restored to the Canon / Eric Sams (ed.). - New Haven and  
London, 1996. In: Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, 1999, vol. 151, p.  
426–428.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:14562>

Williams does well to leave out many of Partridge's unconvincing entries ("hook", "den" – although some omissions are a loss, e.g. "youth"), yet he often quotes the same references as the older book, missing an opportunity to guide readers to less well-known but equally interesting passages. The *Glossary* would also have gained greatly by an index of references to all the plays or, better still, a list of difficult words from each play, since many readers of Shakespeare may not realise that certain words have a sexual implication that could be looked up. There are not enough cross-references to make the book an ideal tool for scholarly work (e.g. compare "head", "lap") and words are not always listed in the most logical way: no entry for "hanging/hanged", only for "well-hanged"; no reference at "naught" (glossed "sexual immorality") to the homophone "nought", thereby cutting readers off from the implications of "O" and "nothing". Aural relationships are similarly suppressed in the case of "sole" which has no separate entry, although one example given at "soul" is in fact *TGV* II.iii.15-18: "this left shoe is my mother (...) it hath the worser sole; this shoe with the hole in it is my mother". Williams' gloss for "soul" – "vital principle or seat of emotions, hence vagina" – is not entirely satisfactory for the quoted passage and the *Dictionary's* reference under "soul" to female *and* male genitals is again more helpful. Students, translators and editors will find a lot of useful information and inspiration in the *Glossary*, but will want to read it with the *Dictionary*, a Shakespeare concordance and some other works in the field near at hand.

Basel

Sylvia Zysset

*King Edward III*. Ed. Giorgio Melchiori. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xvi + 219. Cloth £ 32.50. Paper £ 6.95.

*Shakespeare's Edward III. An early play restored to the canon*. Ed. Eric Sams. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996. Pp. x + 242. \$ 32.50.

The recent past has shown that the question of the Shakespeare canon is alive and well. While the 1980s saw a heated debate about the curious poem "Shall I die?", the 1990s are making much ado about "The Funeral Elegy". More traditional participants in the Shakespeare canon receive continued attention which has been reinforced by, among others, the editors of the Oxford *Complete Works*. The extent of Shakespeare's authorship of *1 Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Sir Thomas More*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* remains debated.

*Edward III* (dated 1592/3 by Melchiori and 1589/94 by Sams) is the latest contender to enter the fray *en force*. Although claims for Shakespeare's part or sole authorship of *Edward III* have tradition and started with the Shakespeare editor Edward Capell as early as 1760, resistance to them has been such that the New Cambridge series under the general editorship of Brian Gibbons (University of Münster) is the first multi-volume edition of Shakespeare to include the play. In the present century, *Edward III* has had a surprising reversal of fortune from Tucker Brooke who found the Countess scenes "hollow and insincere" to John Kerrigan who promised to eat his mortarboard if the Countess scenes were not by Shakespeare. The two editions published within little more than two years both share with Kerrigan their central argument: the play deserves admittance to the Shakespeare canon. While Eric Sams' edition voices the claim in its sub-

title, the back cover of Giorgio Melchiori's advertises the play as "a major new addition to the Shakespearean canon".

Sams and Melchiori agree on the reason for the play's absence from the Shakespeare Folios: in 1598, King James VI of Scotland, the future King James I of England, complained about the London players' disrespectful representation of his countrymen; after that *Edward III* with its villainous and cowardly Scots would have been difficult to stage and undesirable to claim. The two editors disagree, however, on the extent of Shakespeare's contribution like other advocates of his authorship in the past. Sams, with characteristically sweeping rhetoric, has no doubt about Shakespeare's sole authorship and the origins of earlier misconceptions: "Before long, all the modern 'collaborators', 'plagiarists' and 'memorial reconstructors' will be seen as the unevicenced and unnecessary entities they are. One single hand is enough explanation" (p. 2). A large part of his edition – most of the extensive notes (pp. 78-146) plus a separate chapter (pp. 161-202) – is devoted to "the case for Shakespeare". Yet, the nature of the "identifications and linkages" supposed to boost the case for Shakespeare is often utterly unconvincing: "Shakespeare is also said to have studied Stow's *Annales* [...]; so did the author of *Edward III*" (p. 197). Nor do many of the parallels between *Edward III* and Shakespeare's recognized works pointed out in the notes seem of any pertinence. However strong a case may be made for Shakespeare's sole authorship, Sams often appears to bury what may be strong evidence amidst much that is irrelevant.

Melchiori's ingenious account of the play's genesis involves both collaboration and revision. Shakespeare may or may not have been the original "plotter" laying down the general outlines of the play and providing, possibly with the help of others, its first complete treatment" (p. 14) based on Holinshed and Froissart. He is identified with certainty, however, as the reviser who took into account Painter's novella dealing with the Countess of Salisbury (1.2, 2.1, 2.2). As for the rest of the play, Shakespeare's "hand as collaborator can be detected in many scenes of the play" (p. 17) though Melchiori does not pinpoint specific passages; nor does he attempt to identify any of the possible collaborators, an attitude that may be preferable to an "irritable reaching after fact and reason".

Even though Melchiori's analysis is sophisticated and often convincing, it does raise a number of questions and doubts. Why was the supposititious original Countess episode based on Froissart's perfunctory version rather than the well-known novella in Painter's storehouse for Elizabethan dramatists? What evidence is there that the original, unrevised version which Melchiori postulates was composed by "collaborators in the communal enterprise of playwriting" (p. 25) rather than by one author? Why does Melchiori believe that the communal composition of *Sir Thomas More* (a play he and Vittorio Gabrieli have edited for the Revels Plays series) provides an analogue for several other Folio plays? His contention that 2 and 3 *Henry VI* underwent a "communal composition" (p. 14) appears as devoid of convincing evidence as Sams', at the other end of the scale, that "there is no record that [Shakespeare] ever collaborated with anyone until *The Two Noble Kinsmen* c. 1613" (p. 161). While Melchiori seems a kind of neo-disintegrator long after Fleay and Robertson, Sams is a long-standing advocate of Shakespeare's unaided authorship of a good many uncanonical plays (see his *Shakespeare's Edmund Ironside* (1986) and *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years (1564-1594)* (1995)). The last word about Shakespeare's authorship of *Edward III* has clearly not been said.

Apart from the authorship question, Melchiori's edition offers a wealth of other interesting material including a meticulous account of the use of sources, a textual analysis and a stage history. His view of *Edward III* as "the natural prelude to Shakespeare's second historical cycle" (p. 39) is thought-provoking, and *Edward III's* place among Shakespeare's acknowledged works may well be the object of further critical debate. His text is provided with full collation and notes. Sams, on the other hand, disposes of much of the usual editorial paraphernalia – a collation of earlier editions is missing and the sources of his emendations are unacknowledged – and his through-line numbering has surprising gaps between scenes. Sams' rhetoric is often strident and he is positive about a number of points most Shakespeareans are allegedly blind to: *Edmund Ironside* has hitherto been excluded from the Shakespeare canon "for no reason except built-in bias" (p. 203); Shakespeare "was already active if not indeed established in the earlier 1580s" (p. 161); for the theory of memorial reconstruction, "no evidence of any kind has ever existed" (p. 180), etc. Useful, however, is his scene-by-scene commentary on the play modestly called "synopsis".

Sams and Melchiori have the considerable merit to have moved the debate about *Edward III* from an authorial and editorial no man's land to the question of how much Shakespeare contributed to the play. One of the reasons why the play's admittance among Shakespeare's works has been so slow may be that the quality of most of the dramatic writing seems quite weak. Act 2, it is true, is excellent as can best be seen by comparing it to similar treatments of the theme of "chastity threatened" in near-contemporary plays such as *Campaspe*, *The Wars of Cyrus*, and *Soliman and Perseda*. The rest of the play, however, appears clearly inferior. Sams and Melchiori do not dwell on this question though the latter grants that "[t]he play is perhaps no 'Masterpiece'" (p. 3). It is not surprising that Melchiori's survey of twentieth-century productions is much shorter even than that of some plays by Marlowe, Jonson, or Webster. We will need a competent production by one of the leading theatrical companies to find out of just how much the Shakespeare canon has been deprived so far.

Geneva

Lukas Erne

Gary Jay Williams: *Our Moonlight Revels. A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre* (Studies in Theatre History and Culture). Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 344. Cloth \$ 39.95.

Von mehreren fast gleichzeitig erschienenen Darstellungen der Aufführungsgeschichte des *Midsummer Night's Dream* ist dies die ausführlichste und zudem am aufwendigsten gebildete. Das liegt nicht so sehr an der Anzahl der registrierten Inszenierungen dieses heute oft-, wo nicht meistgespielten Shakespæaredramas. Auch werden kaum andere Höhepunkte herausgestellt als die aus mehr oder minder knappen Überblicken vertrauten. Und es geht nicht um die systematische Zusammenstellung erprobter Aufführungsoptionen im Detail, wie sie unlängst Trevor R. Griffiths in Form eines fortlaufenden Variorum-Kommentars zum Text vorgelegt hat (im Rahmen der Serie 'Shakespeare in Production', 1996). Das Besondere und Ansprechende an G. J. Williams' Buch ist viel-